

In addition to being an effective political lobbyist for progressive politicians, Rascón's achievements extend from being a once active water board member to generous community provider. From 1997 to 2001, he served as a Board Director for the Metropolitan Water District MWD in southern California. During his position as a member of the board, he worked to ensure that everyone in Los Angeles County have safe drinking water. He served important roles in the MWD, such as being Vice Chairman of the Subcommittee on Organization and Personnel and an active member of the MWD's Budget and Finance and Legal and Claims committees.

As an active leader in his community, Mr. Rascón is involved in numerous charitable and educational activities in Los Angeles County. By collaborating with other prominent labor organizations, his LIUNA Local 300 has helped raise over \$120,000 in scholarship funding for the children of southern California union members.

Mr. Sergio Rascón is an advocate for every working American in the United States. I am honored to recognize his illustrious career of exceptional and tireless leadership during this year's Cinco de Mayo week in the Latino community. May his legacy continue to live forever.

INTRODUCTION OF THE SMALL BUSINESS HEALTH FAIRNESS ACT OF 2004

HON. JOHN A. BOEHNER

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 5, 2004

Mr. BOEHNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join my colleague, SAM JOHNSON, in introducing the "Small Business Health Fairness Act of 2004."

I have long felt that the most pressing crisis we face in health care today is the number of uninsured Americans, which currently stands at more than 41 million. And the problem is not going away. With health care costs continuing to rise sharply across the country, more and more employers and workers are sharing the burden of increased premiums. Health care costs rose by 14 percent in 2003, and surveys project another increase of 13 percent this year. As costs escalate, the ranks of the uninsured will increase as well.

Today we introduce the "Small Business Health Fairness Act of 2004," which represents a bipartisan solution to this problem. The bill gives small businesses the opportunity to band together through bona fide trade associations and purchase quality health care for their workers at a lower cost.

The bipartisan bill would increase small businesses' bargaining power with health care providers, give them freedom from costly state-mandated benefit packages, and lower their overhead costs by as much as 30 percent—benefits that many large corporations like GM and UPS and many unions already enjoy because of their larger economies of scale.

President Bush addressed this point directly last year during a speech at the Women's Entrepreneurship Summit, where he said, "Small businesses will be able to pool together and spread their risk across a large employee

base. It makes no sense in America to isolate small businesses as little health care islands unto themselves. We must have association health plans." The President is right, and we should help level this playing field so that small businesses can offer quality coverage to their workers.

Importantly, the bill addresses both the access and cost issues at the heart of the health care reform debate, giving uninsured working families new hope for a solution that can give them access to quality health care. Small businesses in most states are stuck with disproportionately high costs because they have to choose from fewer than five providers, so AHPs offer them a new option for them to choose from. By pooling their resources and increasing their bargaining power, AHPs will help small businesses reduce their health insurance costs. Most importantly, AHPs will expand access to quality health care for the people for whom it is currently out of reach: uninsured working families.

I urge my colleagues to join Mr. JOHNSON, Mrs. VELÁZQUEZ, Mr. DOOLEY, Mr. BURNS and I in this effort, and to cosponsor this important legislation.

INTRODUCTION OF THE SMALL BUSINESS HEALTH FAIRNESS ACT OF 2004

HON. SAM JOHNSON

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 5, 2004

Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the "Small Business Health Fairness Act of 2004."

Today we introduce an important component of the Bush administration agenda—the "Small Business Health Fairness Act"—to allow the establishment of certified, federal, association health plans (AHPs).

AHPs will significantly expand access to health coverage for uninsured Americans by: (1) Increasing small businesses' bargaining power with health care providers, and (2) Giving employers freedom from costly state-mandated benefit packages. As such, AHPs will increase the number of insured Americans by up to 8 million people. According to figures released by the U.S. census bureau, one in seven Americans lacks health insurance.

You might ask, just who are these uninsured?

Well . . . they are working people who simply don't have access to insurance, can't afford it, or their employer can't afford to participate in a plan for them. Sixty percent—or 24 million—of uninsured Americans work in small businesses. Some of these people are offered insurance and turn it down because they can't pick up their part of the tab. According to the same census report, the increase in the number of uninsured comes solely from declining coverage in the small employer market. And there is no sign that the trend will reverse, or even slow. Health insurance costs are still rising and many small employers are forced to drop health coverage, while some cannot offer it in the first place.

The cost-saving benefits of AHPs would help the small employers of Main Street access coverage at a more affordable price. Let's face the facts. Costs are rising, busi-

nesses are dropping coverage and more people are left uninsured. Congress must address the uninsured problem and move forward with increasing the insured through Association Health Plans. It's the least Congress can do to ensure that the American people will receive better health care at a more reasonable price.

I urge my colleagues to cosponsor this important legislation.

COMMENDING FREMONT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

HON. BOB BEAUPREZ

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 5, 2004

Mr. BEAUPREZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend Fremont Elementary, a school located back home in my Colorado district, for displaying the kind of academic excellence that is to be recognized at a national level.

Fremont recently received word that they are one of the top three finalists for the 21st Century School of Distinction Award. Over 1,200 schools nationwide applied for this distinction. To be a finalist is an amazing honor for them.

The award is open to all public, private, charter and parochial schools. There are ten different categories of merit. Fremont is in the "Technology Implementation" category. Schools in this category have shown sensible improvement in the implementation of technology in at least one school program or the curriculum itself.

The review board will soon be making a visit to the remaining three schools and will make their final decision pending that visit. The awards program will conclude with a national awards ceremony in June. Also, the winner will be highlighted in a future issue of "Scho-lastic Administrator".

Recently, I had the honor of being able to read to the students at Fremont during their Celebrity Read Week. It was a pleasure to be in the presence of such great and enthusiastic young minds.

I am continually impressed with this school's administration and their dedication to educating these young leaders of tomorrow. The school and its staff raise the bar of academic expectations and set an example for all elementary schools, in and out of my district, to follow. I am proud to live in the same district as a school that exemplifies such superior academic programs.

I would like to wish the best of luck to Fremont Elementary with this award and with all future endeavors. This educational institution has shown amazing academic excellence and I would like to congratulate them for the distinction this has earned them.

IN RECOGNITION OF BROWARD COUNTY, FL

HON. E. CLAY SHAW, JR.

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 5, 2004

Mr. SHAW. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of two programs in Broward County, Florida, that were awarded Acts of Caring